

# Are consumers getting the message from alcohol warning labels?

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Australia's current alcohol warning labels are failing to effectively convey health messages to the public, according to a new study from Deakin University.

Researchers with Deakin's School of Psychology examined awareness of the voluntary [warning labels](#) and the 'Get the facts' logo that directs consumers to the industry-led informational website DrinkWise, and whether alcohol consumers visited this site.

The study found that recall of the current, voluntary warning labels on Australian alcohol products was non-existent, overall awareness was low, and few people reported visiting the DrinkWise website.

"These findings demonstrate that the current approach of industry self-regulation is a straightforward case of regulatory failure," said one of the report authors Peter Miller, Associate Professor of Psychology at Deakin.

The voluntary consumer messages on alcohol products were put in place in 2011 by DrinkWise – a 'social aspects/public relations' organisation which is funded and governed by the [alcohol industry](#) – in response to a recommendation by an independent government review that all alcohol product labels depict a health warning.

The most recent audit showed that these labels are only depicted on around one third of alcohol products.

"Given that the majority of the Australian public support the introduction of mandatory health warning labels for alcohol products, and the success seen from strong, research-based tobacco labelling, it is time for the government to put in place mandatory, highly visible, black and white warning labels on the front of all alcohol products," Associate Professor Miller said.

"We cannot continue to rely on voluntary industry-led measures where these important messages are being obscurely placed and take up less than five per cent of the product label."

The study included 561 participants aged between 18-45 years, who completed an online survey to assess their alcohol consumption patterns, awareness of the 'Get the facts' messages, and their use of the DrinkWise website. Participants were asked about the series of DrinkWise warning labels, including 'It is safest not to drink while pregnant', an image of a silhouette of a pregnant woman with a strike through, 'Is your drinking harming yourself or others?', and 'Kids and alcohol don't mix'.

The results showed that no participants could spontaneously recall the 'Get the facts' logo. Around 16 per cent of participants could recall warning labels on [alcohol products](#) when prompted with images, 25 per cent recognised the logo and 13-38 per cent recognised the warnings. Overall, only 7.3 per cent of participants had visited the website.

Awareness of the 'Get the facts' logo and warning labels was also found to be positively associated with younger drinkers, increased frequency of binge drinking, consuming alcohol straight from the bottle or can, and being a supporter of warning labels.

"Our study demonstrated a low awareness of Australian alcohol warning labels, and a lack of consumer use of the industry-funded website. This highlights that while the DrinkWise brand might be a very successful

marketing ploy by the alcohol industry, it doesn't translate effectively into consumer knowledge or behaviour," Associate Professor Miller said.

"Further research is now needed to evaluate the effectiveness of a consumer targeted alcohol control website.

"Information presented on an alcohol consumer information site needs to be evidence-based, useful and provide practical health advice. Currently, the DrinkWise website is used to create an impression of corporate social responsibility, but it does not promote evidence-based interventions and alcohol-harm reduction strategies."

The results of the study, 'Do consumers 'Get the facts'? A survey of [alcohol](#) warning label recognition in Australia', are published in the *BMC Public Health* journal.

**More information:** "Do consumers 'Get the facts'? A survey of alcohol warning label recognition in Australia." *BMC Public Health* 2015, 15:816 [DOI: 10.1186/s12889-015-2160-0](https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-015-2160-0)

Provided by Deakin University

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